DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 378 528 CS 011 947

AUTHOR	McCabe, Don
TITLE	How To Set Up a Community Education Course for Adults Whose Children (or SPOUSES) Have Reading/Spelling Problems. AVKO "Great Idea" Reprint Series No. 611.
INSTITUTION	AVKO Educational Research Foundation, Clio, MI.
PUB DATE	94
NOTE	19p.; For other documents in this series, see CS 011 943-960.
AVAILABLE FROM	AVKO Educational Research Foundation, 3084 W. Willard Rd., Clio, MI 48420-7801 ($1; quantity discounts available).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Community Education; Elementary Education; Parents as Teachers; Program Development; *Reading Difficulties; *Reading Improvement; Spelling; *Tutoring
IDENTIFIERS	Reading Management

ABSTRACT

This booklet describes the creation of a community education course to provide the one-to-one teacher-student ratio for adults and children who require it to learn to read and spell proficiently. The booklet begins with a discussion of arguments against establishing such a class, including: (1) parents cannot teach their own children; (2) teachers and principals will feel implicit criticism of their work; and (3) children will become confused by being taught one thing in school and another at home. The booklet also discusses steps in initiating the class, committee meeting priorities, advertising as the key to success, how to insure failure of the program, suggestions for maintaining attendance, types of classes, and approaches that have been used successfully. A sample form letter for school principals and a 22-item selected bibliography of books available for parents to help them tutor are attached. (RS)

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How to Set Up A Community Education Course for Adults Whose Children (OR SPOUSES) Have Reading/Spelling Problems

by

Don McCabe

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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AVKO "Great Idea"
Reprint Series #611

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How to Set Up
A Community Education Course
for Adults Whose Children (OR SPOUSES!)
Have Reading/Spelling Problems

by

Don McCabe

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What is AVKO?

AVKO is a non-profit membership organization founded in 1974..

AVKO is subsidized by donations and grants.

AVKO is open to membership to anyone interested in literacy.

AVKO is run by members from as far away as Hawaii and Quebec.

AVKO's daily operations are handled by volunteers.

AVKO plans to build and operate a model reading research center in a year-around camp setting that would economically and efficiently service the needs of dyslexics of all ages.

AVKO hopes to spread the concept that family involvement in tutoring of literacy skills can be successfully taught in adult community education classes.

AVKO provides newsletters and economical opportunities to pursue individual research projects and to take part in large scale cooperative research projects that have immediate practical applications for helping the literacy movement.

AVKO is attempting to accomplish these goals primarily through the profits generated by the sale of services and special materials developed for the special needs of students, parents, and adults.

How to Set Up

A Community Education Course

for Adults Whose Children (OR SPOUSES!)

Have Reading/Spelling Problems!

THE NEED: As you wouldn't be reading this booklet if you weren't already convinced there are a great many parents who have children (or spouses) with reading/spelling problems, we won't bore you with another set of depressing statistics. Instead, we will go straight to the heart of the matter.

GETTING THE IDEA ACCEPTED: Just because you are convinced there is a need for such a class, doesn't mean that the superintendent, the curriculum directors, the special education consultants, the principals, the teachers, and the Director of Community Education will be as excited about the idea as you are. You must realize that it is natural for these people to be less than enthusiastic. It is easy for them to become defensive especially since they can easily infer that you are implying that they haven't been doing their jobs properly. Otherwise, there wouldn't be a reading/spelling problem in the community, or so goes that subconscious line of defensive reasoning.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST HAVING A CLASS.

1. Parents can't teach their own children.

We know that this just isn't true. Parents are a child's very first set of teachers. Parents teach the child his basic language, his basic values, and a multitude of complex actions from eating with a fork to tying shoelaces.

But even if we know this is just a myth, we can't easily dispel it. Arguing won't help. A sense of humor may. Or agreeing with a qualification—then appealing to a person's sense of fair play may help. For example, you could say: "You're absolutely right, MOST parents may not be able to teach their own children, but don't those few parents who have the common sense to know they need special instruction to be able to work with their children—don't these parents have at least the same right to have a class available to them as those people who want to learn how to

to learn how to crochet, repair small engines, play bridge, arrange flowers, sell real estate, or learn to operate computers?

2. PARENTS DON'T HAVE THE PATIENCE to teach their own children or any close relative such as a husband or wife.

We suggest you use the same tact: Of course, most people don't have the patience to teach their own children or any close relative, but some do. This minority shouldn't be denied their rights. Besides, we feel IT IS POSSIBLE TO TEACH PATIENCE in such a class.

3. TEACHERS WILL FEEL IMPLICIT CRITICISM of their work.

Now we are really into the "nitty-gritty" of the situation. No matter what an individual's personal feeling may be concerning how well or how poorly a school's teaching staff is performing, *it doesn't do one bit of good to criticize them.*

For an adult class to teach parents how to tutor to succeed, we must have the cooperation of the teachers. *Criticism won't help. Asking for their help and guidance may.*

We suggest that it is vital to involve teachers actively in the program in the planning stages.

We also feel that it is important that from the outset there are *specific ground rules that criticism of the schools is taboo.* Again, the reason has nothing to do with the truth or falsity of allegations. What we want is a spirit of cooperation to solve a problem. For this, we feel it is best to simply state:

This class is to help adults learn how to provide a service that schools just **cannot economically** perform: **one-to-one** teacher-student ratio for those very few who apparently require it in order to learn to read and spell proficiently.

4. **PRINCIPALS WILL FEEL IMPLICIT CRITICISM of the work of their teachers and their personal ability to run their school.**

We repeat: It is important that from the outset there is to be no criticism of the schools. Even though you may not openly say anything critical, a principal may infer that the whole idea of having a class for parents is an implicit criticism of his school and his teachers. Therefore, we feel it is best that whoever attempts to initiate this program tells all school personnel that this class is merely an attempt to help willing adults learn how to provide a service that schools cannot be expected to perform: providing one-to-one teacher/student ratio for those very few who apparently require it in order to learn to read and spell proficiently.

5. **THE CHILD WILL BECOME CONFUSED by being taught one thing in school and another at home.**

We suggest that you turn this argument around and use it as a REASON FOR having the class. That is, without a class and without direction parents who try to help their youngsters are liable to do just that—confuse their child.

On the other hand, a class in which **cooperation** with the child's teacher **is taught** will result in correct reinforcement of the material taught rather than confusion.

Additional Arguments You Can Expect to Hear Against Having a Class:

6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

STEPS IN INITIATING THE CLASS

1. If you are a teacher, discuss with fellow teachers the problem of not being able to give an adequate five minute answer on **Parent Night** to the rare parent who asks: What can *I* do *at home* to help my child? Wouldn't it be nice if you could say:

   "There's no way I can tell you in five minutes how to diagnose reading or spelling problems and how best to work with your child, but...there's a real great course on how to tutor anybody, even members of your own family. It's on Wednesday nights at 7:30. Perhaps the best thing about it is by just taking the class, it tells your child that you love him enough to spend your time and your money learning how to help him."

2. If you are a parent, discuss it first with your child's teacher. Tell the teacher that you know she is doing the best she can, but that you think your child is one of those that needs more personal attention than a normal school can possibly supply. Discuss it in terms that are positive rather than negative. Try to avoid putting either the teacher or the school system on the defensive. Rather, say that you are looking for ways through the system to become a better parent and to help your child become a better student.

3. Talk to the school **administrator** that you personally think will be **most responsive** to your request. Ask him for his advice on how to go about establishing a committee to look into the possibility of establishing an **Adult Community Education Class** for those who want to learn how to tutor persons with reading/spelling problems—even those closest to them such as children and spouses. After securing a commitment, give him a copy of this pamphlet and ask him to please seriously consider adhering closely to the following committee meeting priorities.

COMMITTEE MEETING PRIORITIES:

1. Find a teacher or teaching team willing to plan and to teach the course. This is absolutely essential and so obvious that you wouldn't think it would have to be mentioned. Except, we know of a system that offered a course for parents BEFORE looking for a teacher willing to teach it. It is embarrassing for a Community Education Director to cancel a class that was offered because he couldn't find a teacher.

2. Secure solid commitments from the Community Education Director and ALL the PRINCIPALS to advertise the project. Your local Project Literacy U.S. (PLUS) may be able to help you with the advertising.

ADVERTISING IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Reasons Why an Advertising Blitz is Absolutely Essential.

1. People who would want to take a class to learn how to tutor if they only knew about it, are NOT looking for it.

2. Standard listing of a course in the standard Adult Education Night Class Brochure will reach very, very few prospective parents of children with reading problems and perhaps even fewer adults whose spouse has a reading problem. Most readers of these brochures read just the listings they are interested in such as Bridge I, Advanced Bridge, Cake Decorating, etc. People interested in taking a Dancing class will skip the others. People who are not interested in any of these classes will throw away the brochure. Even though they might be interested in taking a class in tutoring, they don't look for something they don't expect to find.

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR ADVERTISING

1. Children with reading or spelling problems are NOT dumb. They just need extra help. No child ever deliberately forgets. FORGETTING IS NORMAL. All of us forget things—but never deliberately. Wouldn't it be nice if we could deliberately forget some things?

2. The SCHOOLS and the TEACHERS are doing a GOOD JOB but some children require special reinforcement at home in order to master or maintain skills learned in school.

3. The PATIENCE necessary CAN BE ACQUIRED. Every parent can learn to be as patient with their own child as with any other human being. The key is: Every parent CAN LEARN to be patient if they WANT TO LEARN badly enough. If parents expect their children to have the patience necessary to learn to read they must be willing to learn to be patient themselves.

4. The class will emphasize techniques in tutoring anyone in learning how to improve their spelling. REASON: In our society it isn't considered a sin to be a "bad" speller. We all consider bad spelling to be a handicap, but not one that is related to intelligence. In other words, it is much easier for parents to admit their children have spelling problems than reading problems. It is much easier for adults who have reading problems to accept help related to their inevitable spelling problems because there isn't the stigma attached to being a bad speller as there is to being a non-reader.

How to insure FAILURE for any Parenting or Literacy program

1. Draft a semi-willing teacher.
2. Have the Director of Community Education merely include a listing of the class in its brochure just like any other enrichment activity - and it will be lost.
3. Don't inform the local radio or television stations.
4. Don't bother to inform the teachers about the class, or if you do, do it via a paragraph buried in the middle of weekly announcements or a quick announcement at the end of a long teachers' meeting.
5. Don't bother to ask for help and advice from the principals. That's a good way to bring about failure.
6. Don't bother to involve the parent organizations such as the PTA or the ACLD.
7. Don't involve local literacy groups such as Laubach, LVA, the Orton Dyslexia Society, The Reading Reform Foundation, PLUS, etc. That's another good way to bring about failure.
8. Don't advertise.
9. Don't set up committees to telephone parents.
10. Don't set up committees to call on parents personally.
11. Cancel the class if there aren't enough parents enrolled to cover expenses. That's THE BEST WAY to insure failure. If you're interested in developing the program, you must be willing to offer the program and teach whoever comes for at least two years and let other activities subsidize this program. It will become self-supporting, but it takes time. It will take PERSONAL SUCCESS STORIES to filter out into the community to get others to participate.

SUGGESTIONS FOR MAINTAINING ATTENDANCE

1. Have a partially returnable fee structure. If, for example, the course fee is set for $35.00, have part of the fee refunded every session. For example, the parent could pay $35.00 the first session. When he comes to the second session, he receives a $5.00 rebate plus handouts. If he misses a session, he doesn't get his $5.00 rebate.

2. Have specific handouts with activities planned for each meeting. Let the parents know at each meeting what will happen at the next meeting.

MATERIALS AVAILABLE FOR TEACHING A COURSE IN TUTORING

LESSON PLANS: Every teacher or teaching team should make their own. No commercially prepared set of plans can possibly cope with all the varying needs of all the different types of communities. However, AVKO does have a limited number of lesson plans and materials that it developed for a pilot project. We modestly believe that these can be helpful, especially the first few times the course is offered. The greatest value to this set is that it has a book for the student and one for the tutor that gives the tutor and student an opportunity to immediately achieve success in a 15 minute a day program. The tutor learns at a leisurely pace in the Adult Education course the multitude of things a good tutor should know.

This set of three books, Lesson Plans, Tutor Book and Student Book can be obtained for $19.95 plus $3.50 for shipping and handling from:

Project for Family Involvement in Literacy
AVKO Educational Research Foundation
3084 W. Willard Road
Clio, Mich. 48420-7801

The cost to the school system and to the class members may be kept to almost zero by having local service groups such as the Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, etc., purchase the books with their logos imprinted on them.

Use your local resources such as the school district's reading consultants, adult education consultants, learning disability consultants, and special education consultants. These people should be more than willing to share with you their ideas and materials.

TYPES OF CLASSES

In large school systems that would have a sizable turnout of parents (IF THEY UTILIZE AN ADVERTISING BLITZ), it might be wise to have classes for specific types of parents and students.

1. **FOR PARENTS WHO CANNOT READ**. Some parents may have severe reading problems themselves. They should have their own class in which they can learn as they teach their children. The most important part of the class would be the time spent ensuring that the parents are NOT made to feel guilty or dumb. AGAIN: the title of the class might be something a little less threatening, such as:

   How to help your child overcome spelling problems when your own spelling is just plain terrible.

   Since these parents can't read, they must be contacted personally. Announcements and short sermons from local churches as well as donated radio and TV time are suggested avenues of approach. Your local PLUS representative may help you with this.

2. For parents of EARLY ELEMENTARY school children who have developed problems learning how to spell.

3. For parents of LATER ELEMENTARY OR MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILDREN who have developed problems learning how to spell.

   The reason for separating this group from the first is that while bunny rabbit materials may be appropriate for the very young child, bunny rabbits are "OUT" with this group. The materials and techniques used in remediation should vary by age groups.

4. For Parents of high school students or for SPOUSE of ADULTS who have severe spelling problems.

APPROACHES THAT HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFULLY USED:

1. AVOIDANCE OF SCAPEGOATING. Whether or not the teacher or the class believes "the school" is responsible for the children's (or their) problems, it does NOT help solve any problem for anyone by seeking to cast blame on teachers or schools.

2. SEEKING ACTIVE COOPERATION BETWEEN CLASSROOM TEACHER AND PARENT.

3. REMOVAL OF GUILT FEELINGS. Parents, to be successful tutors, must NOT have guilt feelings toward their children. In turn, the parents must learn how to help their children overcome their guilt feelings for having a learning problem.

4. ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE — ELIMINATE THE NEGATIVE. Whatever materials, techniques, games, strategies, etc. are employed, they should all help the learners develop a positive attitude toward themselves which includes:

   A. TOLERANCE FOR MISTAKES. Not only should the parent have patience and not be critical over mistakes and forgetting, so too must the child. AVKO advocates a policy of teaching both parent and child a simple concept:

      Mistakes are opportunities to learn.

   B. TOLERANCE FOR FORGETTING. Both parent and child must learn to accept forgetting as normal. AVKO advocates teaching the concept that anything can be remembered if only we forget it enough times. FORGETTING is actually a mechanism used by the computer brain to insure that only the necessary information is instantly retrievable.

   C. **BECOME GENEROUS WITH PRAISE — STINGY WITH CRITICISM.**

      Unfortunately, it seems to be part of our culture to be free with criticism and miserly with praise. We believe

that teachers should give the parents actual practice in giving praise to their children. AVKO also believes that parents should learn which habitual language patterns have negative effects upon learning. For example:

AVOID SAYING:

"Didn't I just (tell you, give you, ask you, etc.)

"Why didn't you..."

"Why don't you sound it out?"

TRY SAYING:

"Nice job."

"Good."

"Don't worry about forgetting it. You'll remember the next time."

"You did a good job sounding that word out. I'm proud of you.

BE GENEROUS WITH PRAISE
BUT STINGY WITH CRITICISM

A SAMPLE FORM LETTER FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS: You are encouraged to make free use of it.

Happy Valley Community Schools
Happy Valley South Elementary
123 Main St.
Happy Valley, Utopia 99999

September 7, 19__

Dear Parent:

We would like to let you know that our Adult Community Education Program has just started a new class for adults called:

LEARNING HOW TO TUTOR ANYONE IN SPELLING (OR READING)—EVEN A CLOSE RELATIVE

This letter is NOT meant to suggest that your child needs any more additional help than what he/she is already receiving in the classroom. We are sending this information to ALL parents so that everyone in our community will know that our school is trying its best to help **all** students and **all** parents and **all** adults who need help in improving their reading and spelling abilities.

We recognize that some children require special additional help from home and that some parents often require some training and encouragement to give this special type of help to their child or their wife, their husband, or a friend or relative who needs the help.

For further information call 777-1234 and ask for Mr. Ed Jones, Director of Adult Community Education or Ms. Pat Neumann, Chapter I Coordinator.

If you would like to arrange a conference with your child's teacher to get her opinion concerning the possibility of you taking a class to help your child at home, please call me at 777-5678.

Sincerely,

James Smith
Principal

A selected bibliography of just a very few of the many books available for parents that may be of help in the conducting of a class in tutoring.

Bishop, Margaret. *The ABC's and All Their Tricks.* Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1986.

Bush, Barbara. *C. Fred's Story, A Dog's Life.* New York: Doubleday, 1984.
(This is for fun — but it is excellent for tutoring with later on. Proceeds of this book go to Laubach Literacy Action and Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc.)

Clarke, Louise. *Can't Read Can't Write Can't Talk too Good Either.* New York: Walker & Co. 1973.

Diehl, Kathryn. *Why Johnny Can't Read But You Can Teach Him at Home.* Scottsdale AZ: The Reading Reform Foundation, 1976.

Flesch, Rudolf. *Why Johnny Can't Read.* New York: Harper & Row, 1986.

Frey, Patricia, et. al. *Litsart Trainer Handbook.* Lansing, MI: Michigan Literacy, Inc. 1990.

Granowsky, Alvin et. al. *For Parents and Children: A Guide to Better Reading.* Asheville, NC: TARMAC, n.d.

Henry, Marcia K. *Words.* Los Gatos, CA: Lex Press, 1994.

Henry, Marcia and Nancy Redding. *The tutor series.* Los Gatos, CA: Lex Press, 1994.

Larrick, Nancy. *A Teacher's Guide to Children's Books,* 4th Ed. New York: Bantam Books, 1975.

Lyman, Donald. *Making the words stand still.* Boston: Hougton Mifflin, 1986.

McCabe, Don. *To teach a dyslexic.* Clio,Mich.: AVKO Educational Research Foundation, Inc. 1995.

McCabe, Don. *Get out of my face; get off of my case.* Clio, Mich.: AVKO Educational Research Foundation, Inc. 1994.

A selected bibliography of just a very few of the many books available for parents that may be of help in the conducting of a class in tutoring (Continued from p. 15).

McCabe, Don. *The Patterns of English Spelling.* Clio, Mich.: AVKO Educational Research Foundation, Inc. 1992.

Miller, Julano. *Helping Your LD Child at Home.* San Rafael, CA: Academic Therapy, 1973.

Orem, R. C. *Montessori, Her Method and the Movement.* New York: Putnam, 1974.

Ransbury, Molly Kayes. *How Can I Encourage My Primary Grade Child to Read?* Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, n.d.

Robson, Ed et. al. *LITSTART: Literacy strategies for adult reading tutors.* Lansing, MI: Michigan Literacy, Inc., 1990.

Rosner, Jerome. *Helping Children Overcome Learning Difficulties—A Step-by-step Guide for Parents and Teachers.* New York: Walker & Co., 1975.

Sonday, Arlene. *Fundamentals of reading success (video series).* Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service, 1994.

Vail, Priscilla. *Emotion: The on/off switch for learning.* Rosemont, NJ: Modern Learning Press, 1994.

Weiss, Helen & Martin. *Home is a Learning PlaceµA Parents' Guide to Learning Disabilities.* New York: Little, Brown 1975.

An Overview of the Services
Provided by the
AVKO Foundation

- Inservices, Workshops, Training Sessions for: Classroom teachers, Parents, Homeschoolers, Community Adult Literacy Volunteers, Supervisors, Reading Consultants, Curriculum Consultants, Special Education Consultants
- Educational and Instructional Materials. Write for a FREE catalog.
- FREE DAILY Tutoring at the AVKO Reading Clinic.
- Bernice Webb Memorial Library.

AVKO is a non-profit tax-exempt 501 (c)3 membership organization, founded in 1974, subsidized by donations and occasional grants, open to membership to anyone interested in helping others learn to read, and staffed by volunteers.

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